Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.   (Previously presented) A vehicle sharing system for sharing a fleet of vehicles, comprising:

a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

a plurality of user interface terminals at said plurality of ports for receiving requests for vehicles from the fleet; and

a computer system coupled for communication with said plurality of user interface terminals and programmed for:

in response to a user request received at a first port, defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) of the first port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the first VSG, allocating a vehicle therefrom to the user request;

in response to no vehicle in the first VSG, defining a second VSG of a second port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the second VSG, selecting a vehicle therefrom for allocating to the user request; and

in response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG, generating a relocation request of the selected vehicle from the second port to the first port.

2.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 1, further comprising a vehicle transport device for transporting one or more vehicles from one port to another port.

3.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 1, wherein said computer system is further programmed for including in the first VSG vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period.

4.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 2, wherein:
at least one vehicle in the fleet includes a tow hitch receptacle; and
said vehicle transport device comprises a tow bar for coupling to a tow hitch receptacle and connecting two vehicles together.

5.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 2, wherein:
at least one vehicle in the fleet includes a carrier hitch receptacle; and
said vehicle transport device comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said carrier hitch receptacle of one vehicle, for carrying a second vehicle.

6.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 5, wherein:
said carrier bracket comprises a cycle carrier bracket for carrying a cycle; and
said second vehicle comprises a cycle.

7.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 1, further comprising a display device for displaying the relocation request to an attendant of the second port in response to said computer system generating a relocation request.

8.   (Previously presented) A method for sharing a fleet of vehicles, comprising:
providing a plurality of interface terminals at a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;
receiving a request for a vehicle from the fleet from a user at an interface terminal of a first port;
transmitting the request to a central computer; and

Applicant : Murakami et al.
Serial No. : 09/348,852
Filed : July 7, 1999
Page : 4 of 14

Attorney's Docket No.: 16709-004001

executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer to perform:

defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) for the first port and a second VSG for a second port;

allocating to the request a vehicle from the first VSG in response to a suitable vehicle present in the first VSG;

allocating to the request a vehicle from the second VSG in response to no suitable vehicle present in the first VSG; and

generating a command for relocating the allocated vehicle from the second port to the first port in response to allocating a vehicle from the second VSG.

9. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein providing a plurality of interface terminals at a plurality of ports further includes providing a vehicle parking facility at each port.

10. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the step of defining a first VSG further includes including vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period in the first VSG.

11. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising, in response to the central command generating a command for relocating the allocated vehicle:

connecting a first end of a tow bar to a trailer hitch of a first vehicle and a second end of the tow bar to a trailer hitch of a second vehicle; and

towing the second vehicle with the first vehicle.

12. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising, in response to the central command generating a command for relocating the allocated vehicle:

connecting a carrier bracket to a carrier hitch receptacle of a first vehicle; and

carrying a second vehicle on the carrier bracket.

13.   (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising, in response to the central command generating a command for relocating the allocated vehicle, displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second port.

14.   (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further includes defining the second VSG different than the first VSG.

15.   (Previously presented) A vehicle sharing system for sharing a fleet of vehicles, comprising:

   a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

   a computer system in communication with said plurality of ports and programmed to defining a search depth vehicle search group (VSG) for each port in which one or more available vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time for possible allocation to a user at the port, determine a number of vehicles in a first search depth VSG of a first port and, in response thereto, to determine whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port; and

   means for relocating one or more vehicles from a second port to the first port, upon a determination by said computer system that additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port.

16.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein each port includes a vehicle parking facility at which one or more vehicles may be parked at any given time.

17.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein the first search depth VSG further includes vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period based on the search depth.

18.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein said means for relocating comprises a tow bar for connecting two vehicles together at said second port such that both vehicles may be transported to the first port by a single driver.

19.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein:

at least one of the vehicles in the fleet is provided with a carrier hitch receptacle; and

said means for relocating comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said carrier hitch receptacle of the one vehicle, for carrying a second vehicle.

20.   (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, further comprising a port attendant display device coupled for communication with said computer system and adapted for displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second port.

21.   (Currently amended) A method for sharing a fleet of vehicles among one or more users, comprising:

providing a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

providing a central computer in communication with the plurality of ports;

executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer to perform:

step for defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) for a first port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time, and a second VSG for a second port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time;

determining a number of available vehicles in the first VSG: and

based on the number of available vehicles in the first VSG, determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port; and

Applicant : Murakami et al.
Serial No. : 09/348,852
Filed : July 7, 1999
Page : 7 of 14

Attorney's Docket No.: 16709-004001

relocating one or more vehicles from the second port to the first port, upon a determination by the central computer that additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port.

22. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises:

detecting a location of each vehicle in the fleet;

transmitting the location of each vehicle to the central computer; and

determining a number of vehicles within a designated area with respect to the first port.

23. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 22, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises determining whether the number of vehicles within the designated area is below a preset value.

24. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises determining whether the number of available vehicles in the first VSG is below a preset value.

25. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein relocating the one or more vehicles comprises:

connecting one end of a tow bar to a trailer hitch of a first vehicle and a second end of the tow bar to a trailer hitch of a second vehicle; and

towing the second vehicle with the first vehicle.

26. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein relocating one or more vehicles comprises:

connecting a carrier bracket to a carrier hitch receptacle of a first vehicle; and

carrying a second vehicle on the carrier bracket.

27.   (Previously presented) A vehicle sharing system for sharing a fleet of vehicles,
comprising:

a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

a plurality of user interface terminals at said plurality of ports for receiving requests for
vehicles from the fleet;

a computer system coupled for communication with said plurality of user interface
terminals and programmed for:

in response to a user request at a first port, defining a first vehicle search group
(VSG) of the first port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the first VSG, allocating a vehicle therefrom
to the user request;

in response to no vehicle in the first VSG, defining a second VSG of a second
port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the second VSG, selecting a vehicle
therefrom for allocating to the user request; and

in response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG, generating a relocation
request of the selected vehicle from the second port to the first port; and

a vehicle transport device for transporting one or more vehicles from one port to another
port, wherein:

at least one vehicle in the fleet includes a tow hitch receptacle; and

said vehicle transport device comprises a tow bar for coupling to a tow hitch
receptacle and connecting two vehicles together.

28.   (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 27, wherein said computer
system is further programmed for including in the first VSG vehicles due to arrive at the first
port within a preset time period.

29.   (Previously presented) A vehicle sharing system for sharing a fleet of vehicles,
comprising:

a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

a plurality of user interface terminals at said plurality of ports for receiving requests for
vehicles from the fleet;

a computer system coupled for communication with said plurality of user interface
terminals and programmed for:

in response to a user request received at a first port, defining a first vehicle search
group (VSG) of the first port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the first VSG, allocating a vehicle therefrom
to the user request;

in response to no vehicle in the first VSG, defining a second VSG of a second
port;

in response to at least one vehicle in the second VSG, selecting a vehicle
therefrom for allocating to the user request; and

in response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG, generating a relocation
request of the selected vehicle from the second port to the first port; and

a vehicle transport device for transporting one or more vehicles from one port to another
port, wherein:

at least one vehicle in the fleet includes a carrier hitch receptacle; and

said vehicle transport device comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said
carrier hitch receptacle of one vehicle, for carrying a second vehicle.

30.   (Previously presented) The system as recited in claim 29, wherein:

said carrier bracket comprises a cycle carrier bracket for carrying a cycle; and

said second vehicle comprises a cycle.